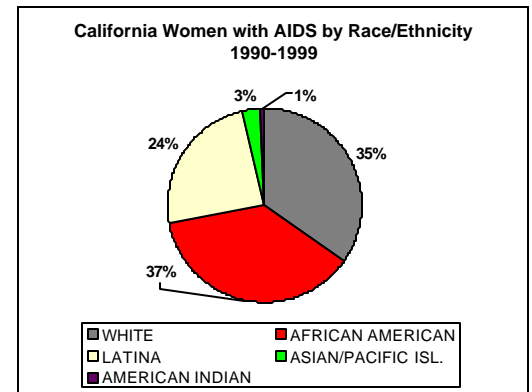


Women and HIV/AIDS in California

Fact Sheet

Introduction

In the early 1980's, the focus of acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) was on men, especially white gay men. Now, women and particularly women of color are the fastest growing population with AIDS both in the United States and in California. The percent of annually reported female AIDS cases in California has risen every year since 1983. Females of color represent slightly more than one-half of all females in the state, but make up 63% of the reported female AIDS cases.



Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) is the virus that causes AIDS.

For California women, the main source of HIV is heterosexual contact (sex with an HIV-infected male). Studies show that women have a higher risk of becoming HIV-infected through heterosexual contact than men do. The second highest method of HIV transmission for women in California is through injection drug use (sharing needles and syringes).

Children (aged 0-12 years)

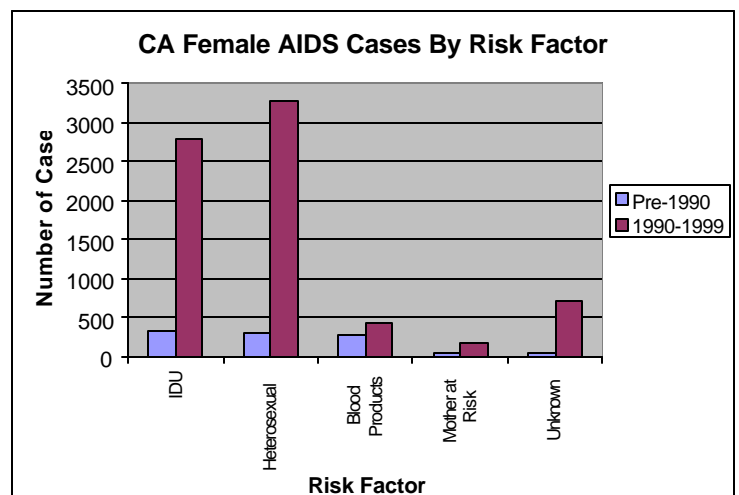
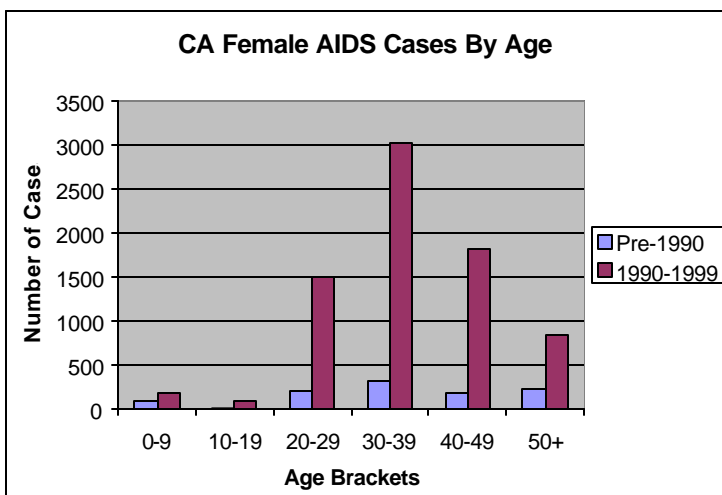
Most infants and children with AIDS in this age group are exposed by their mothers either before or during birth, or through breast-feeding. Nearly 2/3 of children diagnosed with AIDS at age 0-12 years have died. Encouragingly, the number of infants and children diagnosed with AIDS each year has been dropping since 1992, and the annual number of AIDS-related deaths in children has decreased as well. These figures may be the result of anti-HIV medications developed to prolong the health of people living with HIV infection.

Women of childbearing age (13-49 years)

In California, 84% of females diagnosed with AIDS are women of childbearing age. The majority of these women report that they were infected by heterosexual contact. HIV infection through injection drug use is also a large contributor. Women who are HIV-infected should be aware that, if they become pregnant, their baby might also become infected with HIV. Good prenatal care, the use of anti-HIV medications, and avoiding breast-feeding have resulted in fewer babies becoming infected by their HIV-infected mothers.

Women age 50 and over (50+)

Women aged 50+ must be aware that AIDS is not just a disease of the young. In California, women in this age category represent nearly 13% of the total number of reported female AIDS cases, and 12% of the annually reported AIDS cases. Most women 50+ have become infected with HIV by having unprotected sex with an infected male.



Women and HIV/AIDS in California

What Women Need to Know

It is important to know that:

- HIV is the virus that causes AIDS;
- Anyone who has unprotected sex or shares injection drug needles can become infected with HIV;
- A person can look and feel healthy and be infected with HIV;
- An HIV-infected woman can infect her baby during pregnancy, birth and breast-feeding.

Think about getting tested for HIV if you (or your partner):

- Have ever shared needles or syringes;
- Have ever had vaginal, anal or oral sex with an HIV-infected person without using a condom;
- Have multiple sex partners and do not always use a condom;
- Have or had a sexually transmitted disease;
- Have ever used alcohol or drugs and don't remember what happened;
- Are pregnant or thinking about having a baby.

Early signs of HIV infection in some women can include:

- Frequent 'female' problems or an abnormal pap smear;
- Pain in the pelvic area when you do not have your period;
- Yeast infections that do not go away or keep coming back.

HIV can be spread from one person to another by:

- *Blood* (sharing needles or syringes; mother-to-infant);
- *Semen and vaginal fluids* (unprotected sex);
- *Breastmilk* (breast-feeding).

You CANNOT become infected with HIV by:

- Being around someone who has HIV at home, work, school or daycare;
- Casual contact such as closed mouth kissing, hugging and shaking hands;
- The air, swimming pools, and touching things such as drinking glasses, doorknobs, or toilet seats;
- Mosquito or other insect bites.

If you are, or think you might be HIV-infected, or if you have AIDS:

- See your health care provider. Ask what you can do to protect yourself and others. Programs are available for low-income Californians who cannot afford to pay for HIV healthcare.

To find out more information about HIV/AIDS, or about getting an HIV test:

- Call the California AIDS Hotline;
1-800-367-AIDS (English/Spanish/Filipino)
1-888-225-AIDS (TDD)
- Call the National AIDS Hotline;
1-800-342-AIDS (English)
1-800-344-SIDA (Spanish)
1-800-243-7889 (TDD)
- Look in your phone book under "community services" or "AIDS information" for organizations such as the health department, local HIV/AIDS organizations, and women's health clinics.



California Department of Health Services, Office of AIDS

(916) 445-0553

Based on data as of December 31, 1999

